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# Progress Report



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## Corrections Education and Rehabilitative Programs Significantly Reduced

### *at a glance*

Education and drug treatment programs help reduce inmate recidivism and improve safety at correctional facilities by reducing inmate idleness, which is a contributing factor to violence and institutional disturbances.

Due to state revenue shortfalls, funding for education and rehabilitative programs has been reduced in recent years, and the department has eliminated many of its education, vocational, and substance abuse programs. As a result, many inmates identified as needing substance abuse programs are released without receiving treatment. Over half of inmates who did participate in programs did not complete them; one major reason for this was the termination of programs.

The Legislature has funded a 100-hour, transition life skills course for all released inmates, which can help reduce recidivism. However, as currently provided through video rather than by classroom instruction, the course may not achieve the same success in reducing crime.

### Scope

This progress report is one of a series of four reports that informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Corrections in response to recommendations in our *2000 Justification Review*, as directed by state law.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

### Background

The Department of Corrections' mission is to protect the public in two ways: by incarcerating and supervising offenders and by rehabilitating offenders through work, programs, and services. As of June 30, 2004, Florida housed 81,974 inmates in 56 prisons and 67 other facilities spread throughout the state.

<sup>1</sup> Section 11.51(6), *F.S.*

<sup>2</sup> *Review of the Department of Corrections*, OPPAGA [Report No. 00-23](#), December 2000.

<sup>3</sup> *More Efficient Use of Probation Officers and Prioritization of Victim Restitution Needed*, OPPAGA [Report No. 04-58](#); *Corrections Programs Still Challenged by Inmate Idleness, Prison Planning, and Fleet Maintenance*, OPPAGA [Report No. 04-60](#); *Inmate Health Care Consolidation Progressing; Privatization Requires Agency Vigilance*, OPPAGA [Report No. 04-61](#).

Given the social and economic costs of incarceration, rehabilitation through education and other programs that can reduce the likelihood of repeat offending and improve public safety is an important correctional goal. To that end, the department provides academic education, vocational instruction, library services, substance abuse treatment, and transition skills training.

The majority of inmates lack basic educational and employment skills. Nearly 80% test below the ninth grade literacy level. Compounding this problem, over 60% of inmates have a history of substance abuse. Since most prison inmates eventually will be released, programs are beneficial to the process of preparing inmates for their return to society.

A large body of national research has demonstrated that offender participation in such programs reduces recidivism. The department's data confirms this positive effect in Florida. Department data for the six-year period of Fiscal Year 1995-96 through Fiscal Year 2000-01 shows an over 14% reduction in recommitment rates for inmates earning GED diplomas or completing substance abuse programs, and a 24% reduction in recommitment for inmates who received vocational certificates.<sup>4</sup> As it costs an average of \$17,567 to incarcerate each inmate each year, reductions in recidivism produce substantial cost avoidances. For example, the projected reduction in recidivism for inmates who earned a GED or vocational certificate while previously incarcerated in Fiscal Year 2000-01 saved an estimated \$3.2 million, as 182 fewer inmates would have returned to custody.

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<sup>4</sup> The recidivism rates were calculated for 24 months after release.

In Fiscal Year 2004-05, the Legislature appropriated over \$2 billion to the Department of Corrections; of this, \$45.5 million, or 2%, was directed to correctional education and programs.

## Current Status ---

### ***Due to budget limitations, fewer programs are offered***

Our 2000 review determined that a significant number of inmates with identified educational and treatment needs did not receive training or treatment.<sup>5</sup> We reported that this affected not only rehabilitation efforts and recidivism, but also prison security. Inmate idleness is a contributing factor to violence and institutional disturbances.

Since that time, due to major state revenue shortfalls, funding for correctional education and program has been reduced by approximately 30% and the department has eliminated many education, vocational, and substance abuse programs. As shown in Exhibit 1, substantially fewer correctional facilities provide programs now than in 2000. Due to staffing reductions, many of the remaining academic classes are being taught by community volunteers or by inmate assistants and tutors supervised by a small number of teaching staff. As reported in our 2003 review of the Prison Rehabilitative Industries and Diversified Enterprises (PRIDE) Program, the number of prison jobs is also declining, and in 2002 only 2.7% of inmates worked in PRIDE programs.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In Fiscal Year 1999-2000, approximately 65% of released inmates left with scores below the ninth grade literacy level; 1,215 inmates did not participate in the academic programs they needed prior to release; 3,986 inmates did not receive the vocational training they needed prior to release; and 8,760 inmates did not receive the substance abuse treatment services they needed prior to release.

<sup>6</sup> *PRIDE Benefits the State But Needs to Improve Transparency in Operations*, [Report No. 03-68](#), December 2003.

**Exhibit 1  
Fewer State Correctional Facilities Are Providing Programs**

Types of Program	Number of Facilities with Programs	
	Fiscal Year 2000-01	Fiscal Year 2003-04
Academic	52	27
Vocational	44	32
Substance Abuse	86	21

Source: Department of Corrections.

Demand for correctional education and rehabilitation classes has continued to increase, as prison admissions have grown by approximately 10,000 inmates since 2000. Substance abuse programs are particularly in demand. On June 30, 2004, over half (62%, or 51,121) of the 81,974 inmates in prison had been identified as needing substance abuse treatment. During Fiscal Year 2003-04, a relatively small proportion of these inmates (8,067) participated in various substance abuse programs, and 14,350 inmates were released from prison in Fiscal Year 2003-04 who were identified as needing substance abuse treatment but were unable to obtain it during their incarceration.<sup>7</sup>

***Many inmates did not complete programs***

In our 2000 report we noted that approximately half the number of inmates who are placed in correctional education and rehabilitation programs do not successfully complete the courses because they are transferred or released before graduating. We recommended that the department modify its databases to flag inmates scheduled for transfer who are in programs nearing completion to help avoid program disruptions, and allow program staff to participate in decisions to transfer inmates who are in programs.

The department has implemented our recommendation to flag inmates who are nearing program completion. Classification officers we interviewed said they try not to interrupt inmates' program participation by transferring them unless there is an overriding cause, and education staff also reported that they now have more input about inmate movement. However, despite this improved intra-agency coordination, attrition rates are still high for education programs. In Fiscal Year 2002-03, 51% of inmates exited mandatory literacy programs before completion, 88% did not complete GED courses, and 59% exited vocational courses before completing them. The substance abuse program was more successful, as 74% of inmates in such programs completed them. The department reports that program closures are the primary reason for the low completion rates. Many education programs had to close when positions were eliminated due to budget reductions. According to the department, it has lost 45% of its education workforce and closed 29 entire education programs since 2002.<sup>8</sup> As a result, many inmates were unable to complete their programs.

***100-hour transition course initiated for all released inmates; viability questioned***

Over the past three years, the department has increased participation in the inmate transition course. This course teaches basic life skills to inmates transitioning from prison back to society as they are released. Our 2000 report noted that inmates participating in the 100-hour transition course had a lower recidivism rate, which resulted in cost avoidance for the state. We recommended that the Legislature fund the 100-hour transition skills course for all inmates to be released, which would increase the cost avoidance.

<sup>7</sup> The department also conducted 30,146 substance abuse screening assessments at the reception centers in Fiscal Year 2003-04.

<sup>8</sup> During the same time period it opened three new academic programs at Taylor Annex, Lawtey, and Lowell correctional institutions.

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The 2002 Legislature implemented our recommendation by expanding the 100-hour transition and life skill program to include all inmates prior to their release. The course is now offered at all institutions. The department reports that approximately 87% of inmates released in Fiscal Year 2002-03 completed the 100-hour course.<sup>9</sup>

However, due to the loss of positions, the department has changed the way the course is taught, which may reduce its effectiveness. When we initially examined the course, it was taught by an on-site instructor who used a workbook, supervised class progress, and answered questions. Now, due to the reduction in education staff, the course typically consists of viewing instructional videos four hours each day for five weeks or participating in distance learning. While the inmates are given the workbooks to read, many are not literate. This change in instructional design may limit the program's ability to prepare inmates for release and thus its ability to reduce recidivism. The department should evaluate the impact of the restructured class on recidivism.

### ***The department did not pursue statutory changes mandating inmate participation in substance abuse and education programs***

Our 2000 review noted that the department initiated mandatory inmate participation in

substance abuse programs through a rule revision and was planning to make participation in education programs mandatory as well. Without clear statutory authority, such a policy could have increased inmate grievances. We recommended that the Legislature revise Ch. 944, *Florida Statutes*, to eliminate any ambiguity concerning the department's authority to mandate participation in programs.

The department has not pursued statutory changes because it does not consider it necessary. The department believes that Rule 33-507.101(2), *Florida Administrative Code*, is an adequate vehicle for mandated participation of selected inmates in recommended substance abuse programs. According to department staff, most inmates do not object to mandatory participation in the program and the threat of disciplinary reports if they refuse is adequate for most to comply. The department abandoned plans to mandate participation in education programs other than basic literacy classes because budget cuts reduced the number of academic courses available.<sup>10</sup> We conclude that no further action is needed at this time.

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<sup>9</sup> The remainder were released early, refused to participate or transferred to another court jurisdiction.

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<sup>10</sup> Section 944.801, *F.S.*, provides that the department is authorized to mandate literacy education for inmates who test below the ninth-grade level.

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